

Book Review

Archiving People: A Social History of Dutch Archives. ERIC KETELAAR. Stichting Archief publicaties, 2020. 302 pp. ISBN 9789071251481

Eric Ketelaar's *Archiving People: A Social History of Dutch Archives* is a compelling resource for archive users, archival institutions as well as policy makers as it explores the concept of archiving through the influence of social practices using the Model of the archiving context. The book is segmented in 13 Chapters through which the author discusses Archiving People, Churches, States, Cities, Polders and Commons, Property, Trade and Industry, Monies, Litigation, the East, Technologies, Professionals and finally the Dutchness of Dutch Archives. The whole essence of the book as concisely put by Ketelaar is that, "We must understand the societies and the people who created and used the documents before we can really understand their value for research and other purposes. And vice versa: by exploring the social history of archives we may get a better understanding of archiving people in the past, present, and future" (p. 21).

This book, which covers a time span from the Roman times to the present, is based on how archiving was done in the Netherlands and the extent to which these archiving practices were characteristically Dutch. Although the book is mostly based on aspects of the Dutch society; it is without doubt a glimpse of the archiving landscape around the world. The author asserts that he wrote the book in English with the intention that it may be used in further comparative research by other scholars other than the Dutch. The book offers the reader comprehensive footnotes and extensive references in each chapter for further follow ups on issues of interests as well as an index at the end. The richness of this book stems from the wide research from the archival literature, research in the search room of various Dutch archival institutions, digitized archives on the Internet as well as from the writings of historians, political scientists, and sociologists on aspects of Dutch society. This is strengthened by the extensive experience of Eric Ketelaar that spans for 50 years in archives work and research. If one has enjoyed archival practice books such as the 1898 *Manual for the arrangement and description of archives* by S. Muller, J.A. Feith and R. Fruin, *A History of Archival Practice* by P. Delsalle and M. Procter and *Encyclopaedia of Archival Science* edited by L. Duranti and P. C. Franks, they will definitely enjoy reading this book. This book's limitation lies in lack of comparative analysis of the different archiving concepts and experiences from other countries or continents on the best practices. This is despite the author's own acknowledgement of the importance of comparative research (p. 296).

Chapter one, Archiving people, illuminates Ketelaar epigraph, "archiving of the people, by the people, and for the people." Ketelaar interestingly shows how correct archiving of people by church authorities as well as civic authorities is not only in the interest of the archive creator, but also in that of the archived people themselves (pp 27). A classic example is by the Roman Catholic Church which archived people's marriages in order to discourage clandestine marriages, bigamy, and concubinage. Ketelaar in Chapter 2, Archiving the Church, discusses how the church served as the centre of society using case studies of archiving by the Roman Catholic and Protestant Churches. He postulates that for a long time, both government and the churches preferred the churches managing their archives which is mostly still the same here in

Africa, particularly the ESARBICA region. The church, run by missionaries, played a big role in archiving people's lives especially before independence of most states in the region. Ketelaar concludes that "Archiving the Church" happened in a social context where it served both the interests of the Church and of its members (p. 72). Chapter 3, Archiving the State, focuses on the administration and archiving by the chancery and the charters of the counts of Holland and Zeeland who their greed for power was characterized by a 'hunger for information' (p.75). Here, the author suggests that changes in recordkeeping are often the result of external political developments. The author on Chapter 4, Archiving Cities, addresses the question of how administrators and citizens used the city's archiving and how such use influenced the creation and accessibility of the archives. The author notes that while archiving in the 13th-century cities in the Netherlands focused on foundation charters, privileges, treaties, and other charters, the practice of having the City Archives as separate institutions serving both the government and the citizens started in the 19th century. It is important to note here that the latter practice has been adopted by ESARBICA member states and it is still the norm. Was this accidental or due to conscious adoption from abroad as the author puts it, is a question for another day. Ketelaar is convinced that nowadays the boundaries between documents created by government and other independent institutions are becoming blurred with the privatization and outsourcing of public functions as well as modern information and communication technologies in which all activities, situations, incidents, conversations, and interactions are turned into data (p. 124) The contention brought by *Archiving people: A Social History of Dutch Archives* that societal practices influences archiving is evidently clear in Chapter 5 where Ketelaar explores the Archiving Polders and Commons which on its own as a subject is not common, especially in the African archives Literature. Research on the area seems limited and if done, it is mixed within other areas of study. This is also revealed in the author's discussion that in Holland archiving by the oldest regional water boards initially focused on the privileges and other charters, analogous to early archiving by the Church, by feudal lords, and the cities.

Like elsewhere around the world, Ketelaar alerts us to Posner's statement that one of six basic types of records 'that may be called constants in record creation are records regarding real estate' in Chapter 6, Archiving Property. The author stresses that in the archival history of what is now the Netherlands, archiving rights pertaining to immovable property is a constant. Chapter 7 discusses Archiving Trade and Industry. The author postulates that archiving trade and industry in the Netherlands was influenced by government increasing regulations, the intense growth of trade since the middle of the 19th century, and the introduction of 'scientific management' and new methods for calculating cost and profit (p.189). Ketelaar alerts the reader to Archiving Monies in Chapter 8 where he likens archiving money to archiving real estate records, acknowledging the fact that pattern may change as community norms change. Nonetheless, he concludes that the records used for tax assessment and collection show comparable endurance over time (p.214). Ketelaar posits that although the judiciary in the Netherlands in the Middle Ages and early modern times had many forms, both civil and criminal cases proceeded mostly in writing. He discusses this archiving the judiciary in Chapter 9 by using the Model of the archiving context to answer the questions on the documentary outcome of the procedural act of the parties and the judges as well as the relationship between work processes and archiving. Chapter 10 explores Archiving the East Indies as one of the continents the Dutch explored, traded, warred, and colonized in various continents around the globe which influenced the archiving systems and practices. The chapter is mostly based on

the author's previous research on Dutch explorations of the coasts of Australia and New Zealand.

In *Archiving Technologies*, as discussed in Chapter 11, Eric Ketelaar argues that the technologies used by people not only influence the material, the language, the script, the form, the arrangement, and preservation of the documents created and archived, but they also influence the content which is mostly evident when technology changes (p.275). In *Archiving professionals explored* in Chapter 12, Ketelaar distinguishes the 'archiving people' (as referred to in the previous chapters) from the archivists. He explores ways in which they differ and addresses the questions of what was or is a professional archivist as well as how the archival profession in the Netherlands developed. Ketelaar posits that since the beginning of the late 19th century, the Dutch archival profession was formed in stages which were differentiation, specialization, institutionalization, and legitimization (p. 278). Since then, he concludes, the profession has redefined itself time and again, adapting to a society that is changed by cultural, political, and technological challenges. Lastly Ketelaar explores *The Dutchness of Dutch Archives* in Chapter 13. He directs the reader to the fact that the examples given throughout the book are a starting point for research in social, cultural, and political contexts outside the Netherlands signalling the Dutchness of Dutch archives as a hypothesis to work from. He calls archivists to do more research into the transfer of archival knowledge between different countries.

In conclusion, this book displays Eric Ketelaar's mastery of archiving history and practice in the Netherlands. Its importance lies in how societies shape the archives and conversely. It surely fills a gap in the archival history and practice literature. It is hoped the book provokes archivists, particularly African archivists to write about their "archiving of the people for the people by the people" which has gone mostly under researched.

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